

Canterbury no longer rivalled the University of Paris in scholarship and in philosophy. The monks no longer, as in the days of the Barons' War, played a patriotic and formidable part in the politics of the country. The life of the monastery was cut off from the life of the nation. Narrowness of sympathy was the most serious fault of the monk. He had little interest in what went on outside the abbey close. He had nothing to care for or to work for, except the maintenance of the wealth and position of his House. His whole life was spent in its corridors and gardens, except when he was sent out in company with another brother to gather the rents of its distant estates, or to accompany the abbot on his occasional visit to London. He spent all his waking hours in company with several score of other men, as singly devoted as he was himself to the interests of the place, with nothing else to talk of but the superiority of their choir-singing to that of the neighbouring abbey, and with nothing else to wish but that their new chancel might be, when it was finished, the finest in the country-side. It is not wonderful that he was ready to fight to the death for the claims of his House against the demands of townspeople or peasants, to whom the old privileges of the monastery had, under changed conditions, become galling and vexatious. It is not wonderful that he developed a narrowness of mind which made him, in questions of local or national interest, a dead weight on society.

But there was another side to the monk's life. He had leisure, he had been taught to read and write, he had at hand a library, compiled by the patient labour of long generations of copyists now sleeping under the flag-stones of the cloister. On one side of that cloister, screened off from disturbers, he spent many hours transcribing books, or teaching boys to read off well-thumbed manuscripts set apart for beginners. This was the most useful work of the later monasteries ; but it may be questioned whether the educational and literary product of the last two centuries of their existence was in any proportion to the great sums of money and the thousands of able hands which they withdrew from a nation that was sorely deficient in money, and still more sorely deficient in population. The instruction of boys, intended for the Church, in the art of